

Safety Standards have been incorporated in these schemes. It must also consider whether food safety activities undertaken by different government agencies in NSW should be done by a single agency and if so, how that could be achieved.

## Local government

The participation of local government is seen as crucial to the success of food safety reform. Councils' relationships with local business means that they are uniquely placed to provide an effective service that is appropriate to local needs.

Local government already plays an important role in training food handlers and this should continue. Council environmental health officers will retain their existing role in investigating complaints and administering and enforcing the *Food Act* and the Food Safety regulations.

## NSW Health

NSW Health will work with ANZFA to finalise the implementation of the Food Safety Standards and then promote the initiative to food businesses in NSW. After that the major role for NSW Health is expected to be managing the Food Safety Standards and monitoring and evaluating the food safety system.

NSW Health food inspectors will continue to have responsibilities for administering and enforcing the *Food Act* and regulations. They will also retain their existing role in the investigation of food borne illness outbreaks. Food inspectors may be involved in monitoring the auditing system and the performance of approved auditors.

## Management of the food safety system

The paper provides an outline for the food safety system. It includes mechanisms for monitoring industry performance, coordinating regulatory responsibilities and monitoring the integrity of the proposed system.

The likely impacts of the reforms on industry, government and consumers are considered and a proposal made to establish an overall system for evaluating the effectiveness of the new food safety approach.

## Where can you get the information paper?

The information paper is available from:

Better Health Centre,  
Locked Mail Bag 5003  
Gladesville, NSW 2111  
Tel. (02) 9816 0452  
Fax: (02) 9816 0492

It is also available from your local council, local public health unit (look under 'Health' in the Telstra *White Pages*) and local library.

It is also available on the NSW HealthWeb site:  
[www.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au)

# A new approach to Food Safety in New South Wales

## A NSW Health Information Paper

## Food safety

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Ensuring the safety of the food supply is an essential part of protecting the health of our community. Food is the most fundamental of needs and the NSW community has a right to expect that their food supply will be safe.

The Information paper explains the strategy that will provide greater assurances of food safety. It includes wide-ranging measures to manage food safety and improving the efficiency of food regulation.

## Why a new approach is needed

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While the food supply is generally considered to be very safe, many Australians still suffer unnecessarily from food poisoning every year. Part of the problem is that consumer preferences and the science and technology of food production are changing rapidly, and food regulation has not kept pace with these changes.

## National Food Safety Standards

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Australian Health Ministers directed the Australia New Zealand Food Authority to develop new national Food Safety Standards in cooperation with States and Territories. These Standards will be introduced in 2001 to give Australia uniform food safety laws.

The Standards will improve food safety by introducing a preventive and risk-management-based approach. This is a significant change to the way food safety has been regulated in Australia.

All food businesses in Australia will be affected in some way by these regulatory reforms. The reforms aim to invest in food businesses the responsibility for producing and selling safe food.

## The Food Safety Standards

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All food proprietors, with the exception of those that are selling foods that are not potentially dangerous at events which raise funds for community or charitable causes, will have to provide information about their business through a notification process. This information will allow the business to be classified according to the potential risk posed by its operations.

As a large proportion of food borne illness is caused by poor food handling practices, there are requirements for all food handlers and supervisors to have the appropriate skills and knowledge in food hygiene.

Manufacturers, importers and wholesalers will have to establish a system for food recalls.

There are no general licensing requirements, however some businesses that have the highest risk classification may have to hold a licence, or will have to develop, adopt and operate a food safety program based on HACCP concepts. All food safety programs will be checked by approved independent auditors. Licensing may also be used in some primary production sectors.

The existing NSW food hygiene regulation will be replaced by nationally uniform food safety standards. These standards will encourage and facilitate the production of safe food by requiring the adoption of good hygienic practices and appropriate design and

construction features. Complying with these standards can control many of the potential threats to food safety.

Investing responsibility for food safety with the food industry means that the government will need to regulate in a different way the food businesses having to accept responsibility for producing safe food.

## Streamlining regulatory arrangements

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In July 1999, a new agency, Safe Food Production NSW (Safe Food) was established and has taken over the functions of the Dairy Corporation and the Meat Industry Authority.

Food Safety Schemes for the primary industry sectors are being developed and implemented. These new requirements will reflect the Food Safety Standards. The retail sector is not covered by Safe Food, except for retail meat premises.

NSW Health will oversee the implementation of the Food Safety Standards in the retail sector, and in the manufacturing sector wherever Food Safety Schemes have not been introduced. NSW Health will also continue to be responsible for surveillance and monitoring of food borne illness and will retain responsibility for food recalls.

Under the *Food Production (Safety) Act*, a Ministerial review of the operation of the *Act* must be commenced by the end of 2001. This review must assess the coverage and effectiveness of the Food Safety Schemes and the extent to which the Food